WHILE THE RIVER WAS HIGH

The sun stood over the sacred silk-cotton tree toward the Gankwe side of the land. Across the path leading from somewhere in the back of our shelter the parasol ants, each with its strip of green many times its size, made their way toward an unknown spot where no shelter stood, and no one trod. Like a wave the wide ribbon of green rose and fell as it crossed the ridges of the pathway. In unending numbers they came, and the lizards darting in and out of the brush swerved in the direction of the shelter to avoid the marching line, so that at our feet things moved now up, now back again.

While the men were at the landing place, one of the women who was drying rice on the high flat rocks opposite our shelter paddled over in her boat, and, passing the men with a formal greeting, walked on and stopped to talk with us. She was not a young woman. Her time for childbearing was long over, her wrinkled breasts sagged almost to her waist. The cicatrized designs which once had stood out so clearly, and in her youth had been so valued, were but faintly penciled on her face and about her breasts. Had she cared, she might have reopened the cuts, might have had ashes rubbed into them to make the keloids stand out black and alive against the dark brown of her skin. But what need had a woman her age to care? What need to urge life into symbols of fertility on face and between breasts and about her navel, when her time for fruitfulness was over? Of what use to reanimate the incised scrolls between her thighs, when the legend they told in terms of reproduction was for her a dead legend?

She came toward us slowly, balancing a bottle on her head. A faded cloth covered her from waist to knee, and at her waist a bit of the kerchief necessary to the attire of the married woman, even at work, could be seen. She wore a few beads on a cord about her neck, but she had no other ornaments, for ornaments were for festive occasions, and the cloth tied about the neck and worn cape fashion was for women who had children to carry straddling their backs, and woven garters below the knee were conceits of the young.

Herskovits A Herskovits E-4 (1928-1929) 1934
Bush Negroes
Saramacca

133 But now a soft haze floated over stream and bush. To the right was the Ingi Sopi channel, dropping so sheer that not even an unloaded dugout could make its way up the rapids, not a single log of wood could be floated down. To the left was the Mamadam, a smoother, more rounded slope. It was up these falls that our boats would later be hauled.

501 484 Below us on the rocks our men were unloading the corials and carrying the provisions along the narrow trodden path to the topmost ledge of the falls, where the empty dugouts would be reloaded after they had been taken up through the streaming water.

133 Beyond lay the full stretch of the river. As far as the eye could see, there were none of the channels, none of the many islands which are met with everywhere on this river from its very headwaters to the reaches of the tidal belt near the coast. About us was a stillness which the very roar [134] of the water heightened. The parrots had long ago passed on in pairs. The butterflies would wait for the sun before they went winging from the east bank to the west. This was a moment of pure interlude. No sun, no breeze, no 000 sound, no glow. This was the moment before the fragmentary dawn would end, before the haze would lift, this the moment when night, having met day, as the Bush Negroes said, was disappearing from sight.

"It is fine here, ai!" Bayo called to us, as he walked on • [482] with a large canister balanced on his head, making his way up the rocks with the sureness and ease of one who is strolling down a lane with the consciousness of a pleasant encounter at the next turning.

798 346 As soon as the mist had lifted, we walked up the rocks to the shrine. Facing us and the lower river, a tall, slender pole, weathered to a pale silver, stood higher than the roof of the shrine in front of which it was planted. At its top were the crude outlines of a head and, some three feet from its base, two side pieces were nailed to it and grounded at an angle to steady the image against the onrush of a sudden wind. A short distance from the pole was the shrine

Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1929-1930) 1934
Bush Negroes
Surinam

Later, through the gathering darkness, the people of the neighboring villages went home, paddling their boats which were loaded down with the fish that had been netted. And from this time on, everyone knew that this seku vine was the property of him who had found it, and of his family, down through his mother's line, forever.

"Ai, mati, you would have seen something, if you had got here for the seku dance!"

6

Like any other Bush Negro village, S'ei was a series of sandy clearings about which were grouped huts of woven palm fronds and palm thatch. All about was the big bush. The trails which led from the village were each guarded by a magically treated palm stang, and shrines to the ancestral spirits who saw to it that evil was kept away. Where the several paths led, a stranger was not encouraged to discover. Down one, women were to be seen disappearing in the morning with trays on their heads, their infants astride their backs, held inside the folds of a cloth which was fastened high above their breasts, and caught up again below them. In many upper river villages, this path led to the fields, some distance away. Others were the way to shrines, erected to those spirits which must be worshiped outside the village. Another path might lead to a brook, which the villagers held sacred. There were trails, too, which connected neighboring villages, and led perhaps farther yet, but for the stranger, the highway was the river, and no matter how short the distance between one settlement and another, he was not invited to make his way through the bush.

"You do not want to go through the bush, white man. In the bush are evil spirits," we heard many times.

A village clearing was divided into quarters. Each quarter was inhabited by one of the *mâs*, or extended families, and the quarter bore its name. It was composed of several households—five or six or more, depending upon the size of the

Herskovits & Herskovits 2-5 (1933-1958) 1934
Bibl Rush Negroes Bib
Saramaccas

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The next day was our last among the Saramacca people. Bayo came to us early to help with the packing. He was apparently none the worse for his seizure and, as he worked, we could tell from his manner how release had come to him and how the tension we had noticed the past few days had left him.

On his body were no marks. His mouth showed no cuts where the glass was bitten off and chewed. When we told him about the glass, he knew nothing of it. Had he not known about this eating of glass, he might well have doubted our word, for when we examined his lips and palate and tongue, not even a scratch showed.

"What did you drum last night, Bayo?"

"When, before the obia came to me?"

He remembered nothing after he had leaped from the improvised apinti to run into the bush.

"Not when you drummed apinti, but when you came back here and took the tumao to the river."

"I don't remember. Did I do that?"

8

Despite the early hour we had to leave in order to catch the weekly train for the coast, the boats of our friends began to be seen off the landing place as they came to say their farewells. The good woman Tita, whom they called Mother Snake behind her back, was the first to arrive. She walked slowly up from the river bank, pipe in mouth, a pot on her head, and one in each hand. The pots held obias which, she said, were made especially for us, to give us great powers in our own land—one to keep us safe from the ghosts of those we had wronged; one to guard us against the acts of the unfriendly living; one to make all those from whom we sought advantage "love" us.

Sedefo's younger wife came with her child on her back to collect whatever tin cans were about, and some gift for the child when it wakened, knowing that something was

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

to and camps before his little fire. The red monkey bands howl in the darkness, but the hunter is not afraid. The fact that a puma may be in a tree near by does not prevent him from snoring.

The Bush Negroes seldom have occasion to take a white man hunting. Because of his incompetence they are forced to hunt differently when he is along.

We are aroused at five o'clock one morning when Daniels, a "balata bleeder" from British Guiana, makes his appearance. He is a husky, powerful Negro from Demerara, a town in the adjacent colony, and one of the few men ever to obtain the confidence and friendship of the Djukas. Some years ago he saved many Bush Negroes from famine, when the cassava and rice crops had failed, by arranging, with the aid of Mynheer Alexander Wolff, for the Dutch government to give many thousands of guilders' worth of rice to feed them. Because of this, and because he speaks English perfectly and has the bohkra's point of view, no better person could possibly accompany us on the coming hunt.

The three Bush Negro bearers who go along with us carry wicker baskets of woven reed containing supplies. They are carried on the bearer's back, held in place by a band around the forehead—a device borrowed from the Indians.

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

into the ground, becoming roots. The jungle vines, the lianas, twine about the boles of palms, adding to the tangle of leaves. The jungle is one immense struggle, none the less fierce because it is silent. The foliage is fighting for light and air.

We wade across a number of small creeks that bar our path. Beautiful flat-winged butterflies hover in the hot air. The drone of other insects continues until our ears become accommodated to the sound and we no longer hear it. For five hours the trek continues.

At eleven o'clock a halt is called for lunch. The Djukas drop their fifty-pound packs, under which they have trotted more easily than the white with only a gun and cantern. A little fire is started and we begin to eat. The creek beside the camp has no name; it is known only as a small tributary of the Lombe Creek. This is the occasion for a little ceremony. The stream is to be named after the first person to eat beside it, which in this case is a white man. A Bush Negro takes a mouthful of water from the creek and spits it back, motioning us to do the same. We comply. Then the Negro names the stream "*Datra Cong Creekee*"—"Doctor Kahn Creek." The others respond with solemnity, "Daso." We pass a few pleasantries and go on.

By two o'clock the fatigue is beginning to tell on the bahkra. A halt is called. The country gets higher as we leave the neighbourhood of the river, but the bush does not thin out. The ground is rolling, with knolls fifty feet high. Up these the carriers scramble like goats, despite their load, but Daniels says they are going slow because of the bahkra. Be-

/141 cont./
of this predatory cultivation has been reached. The nearby agricultural lands are kept in use with too brief a rest period, with the result that the soil is overworked and the periodic recovery of the forest proceeds at an ever slower pace. In addition one struggles to an increasing degree with the problem /142/ of the leaf-cutting ants, which keep the easily accessible places occupied.

The consequence of this circumstance is that the Bush Negroes are forced to make the grounds farther and farther from their villages. One travels for hours up or down the river in order to reach good land. When one cannot make good use of a forest creek in order to transport the produce from the field, one is forced to carry the harvest for one or two hours through the forest to the river. The Bush Negro does not go farther than a two hours' walk (about six kilometers from the river) (see the map /see p. 13/).

On the Tapanahoni one spends even days in traveling to less populated areas in order to plant and to harvest. One then establishes so-called work camps along the river, from which one operates in the surrounding areas. This is the case, among others, between Godoholo and Granbori for people from Drietabbetje or other centers. That one does not go even farther up river, all the way past the last village, Granbori, has to do with a prohibition by the gaaman of the Aucaners. That is, the latter wants to reserve the lands lying beyond this point as hunting lands and therefore will not make them available for agricultural purposes.

The inhabitants of the villages along the lower Tapanahoni, such as Sajé, Clementi, and Malobbi, frequently lay out their food grounds in the Lawa, where they can have at their disposal agricultural lands as far as the Aboenasoengoe Falls. Farther upstream on this river the Bonni or Aloekoe Negroes assert their rights.

5. Differences between Aucaners and Paramaccaners

The conditions given above apply in the main to the Aucaner Bush Negroes of the Tapanahoni. They number today approximately 6,500 persons. The Paramaccaner Bush Negroes of the Marowijne, approximately 1,700 in number, are in somewhat more favorable

4: Geijskes--17 G.N-5 (1952) 1954 SRS Bush Negroes SRS

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Fig. 7. Ten-month-old food-ground with high cassava. On the right, hanowgri, weeds in the foreground. -- Tapanahoni, Drietabbetje, Oct. 1952.

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Fig. 8. Large, three-month-old food-ground with harvestable maize and watermelons. Rice in the foreground. -- Tapanahoni, Drietabbetje, March 1952.

/5 cont./

133 182 This extreme fragmentation of the relief must be remembered as one of the ecological factors influencing the human peopling most directly; it renders the transport of heavy loads impracticable, the establishing of roads practically impossible. Men are led to [361] settle along the rivers, which constitute the only routes of penetration toward the interior of the country.

133 132 All the important rivers flow into an alluvial valley whose width varies from some tens of meters to a kilometer, dry during the greater part /6/ of the year, but flooded under several meters 134 241 of water during the great rains of May-June. This annual inundation makes the alluvial lands unfit for agriculture; the inhabitants of Guiana cultivate only sloping lands and even very steep slopes readily; for good drainage of the soil is indispensable for the raising of manioc whose tubers, which remain in the ground for more than a year, are threatened with rotting.

311 The cultivable zone is in fact closely limited around each village. Practically, it is limited to a strip of 1,500 to 2,000 meters along the banks of each watercourse accessible to pirogues. [482] [462] Transport of manioc tubers, carried on by the women several times a month, becomes impracticable if the distance to be covered with loads is greater than two kilometers at the maximum(1).

[101] [131] [184]

1. The Djuka, very numerous on the Tapanahoni, cultivate as far as three or four kilometers from the river; but in general, the Refugee Blacks prefer to build farming habitations at a distance of several days' by boat from their village when this gives them the possibility of farming in the neighborhood of the banks.

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Fig. 22. Offering of food to the ancestors.

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Fig. 23. Interrogation of the dead person.